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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 65/264, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to improve the international response to natural disasters and to report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-sixth session. It provides an overview of the occurrence of disasters associated with natural hazards and highlights emerging trends. The report describes several key challenges and looks at progress made in various areas. It concludes with a number of recommendations.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 65/264. The period covered by the report is from 1 June 2010 to 31 May 2011. Where relevant, more recent information has also been included.

II. Year in review (1 June 2010-31 May 2011)

A. Disaster data for the calendar year 2010

2. During the period from January to December 2010, both the number and in particular, the impact of natural disasters increased compared to 2009. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) reported a total of 385 natural disasters that killed over 297,000 people, affected 217 million others and caused an estimated US$ 123.9 billion of economic damage.[1]

3. Although the number of reported disasters was consistent with the annual average during the period from 2000 to 2009 (387 disasters), the number of victims[2] increased compared to 2009, owing to several large-scale disasters. The year was the deadliest in at least two decades and is further dramatic testimony to the growing intensity of extreme events. Natural disasters have continued to occur in countries which were already suffering from conflict, compounding the humanitarian situation for the concerned populations.

B. Climate-related hazard events

4. Hydrological disasters wreaked havoc during the reporting period, as extreme rainfall and associated flooding broke records in many countries. In Asia, Pakistan was struck by the worst floods in its history. Over 18 million people were affected by flooding that inundated one fifth of the country's land mass, destroyed more than 1.8 million homes and made millions homeless. In China, massive floods and landslides caused over 7,000 deaths and affected a total of 134 million people, while economic damages were estimated at $18 billion. In Sri Lanka extreme rainfall caused wide-scale flooding, landslides and displacement, affecting 1.2 million people and displacing over 1 million. In Australia the worst flooding in half a century affected millions of people, while Thailand was affected by both flooding and drought, affecting at least 9 million and 6.5 million people, respectively.

5. In other parts of the world, the heaviest recorded rainfall in Colombia caused floods and landslides, cumulatively affecting 3.7 million people, especially those displaced and made vulnerable by the internal armed conflict. Flooding also affected the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Central America and the Caribbean region. In southern Africa, the rainy season resulted in excessive flooding that reached record river water levels throughout the region. Similarly, extreme rainfall and widespread

[1] The CRED EM-DAT (international disaster database) records disasters which meet at least one of the following criteria: 10 or more people reported killed; 100 or more people reported affected; declaration of a state of emergency; call for international assistance.

[2] Defined by CRED EM-DAT as "the total number of people killed and affected".

flooding affected West Africa, especially Benin, where flooding impacted the lives of 680,000 people and destroyed tens of thousands of homes.

6. The reporting period witnessed a relative lull in terms of meteorological hazards.[3] Regardless, in October 2010 Typhoon Megi impacted the lives of nearly 2 million people and destroyed 30,000 houses in the Philippines, while Cyclone Giri in Myanmar affected 260,000 people and caused 100,000 to lose their homes. In Mexico, hurricanes damaged a total of 500,000 houses.

C. Geological hazard events

7. On 11 March 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and resulting tsunami struck Japan. As of 30 June, the Government confirmed 15,511 deaths, 5,388 injured and 7,189 people missing, while 116,213 persons remained evacuated from the affected areas. The combination of the earthquake and tsunami hazards severely damaged the Fukushima nuclear power plant and caused an increase in the radiation levels in the surrounding areas, thereby underscoring the need for multi-hazard preparedness approaches.

8. Elsewhere, significant earthquakes struck New Zealand first in September 2010 and again in February 2011. The September earthquake caused a total of $6.5 billion in economic damage. In Indonesia, the Mount Merapi volcano erupted twice in October and November 2010, killing 386 people and displacing over 400,000. Also in October, an earthquake and tsunami battered the Mentawai islands, killing 460 people, displacing 15,353 and destroying thousands of houses.

D. Epidemics

9. A cholera outbreak was confirmed in Haiti in October 2010, resulting in more than 5,500 deaths and over 360,000 cumulative cases by the end of May 2011. Although the epidemic seemed to have stabilized in many areas by March, it reached a second peak in late May. Despite a resurgence of cholera cases, mortality rates have been declining steadily in all regions. The resurgence was addressed through coordinated prevention and response actions that also mitigated the further spread of the epidemic. Humanitarian actors will continue to work with line ministries and development actors to ensure sufficient investments in the water and sanitation sectors in order to address the longer-term risks of epidemics.

E. Environmental hazards

10. During the reporting period, technological accidents and natural disasters with resulting environmental emergencies continued to occur, posing great challenges to the lives and livelihoods of affected populations. Events such as oil spills, dam and dyke breaches, acute pollution and poisoning, and nuclear-related accidents highlight the need for greater attention to the humanitarian consequences of environmental and technological disasters. In order to increase the resilience of

[3] CRED EM-DAT defines meteorological hazards as "events caused by short-lived/small to mesoscale atmospheric processes (in the spectrum from minutes to days)", including different varieties of storms.

populations, environmental and technological risk and hazard considerations need to be better integrated into overall preparedness and response policies.

III. Evolving nature of disaster risk

11. The number of people killed by disasters in 2010 (297,000) was well above the annual average of 82,500 from 1970 to 2010. Since 1990, the number of recorded disasters has doubled from about 200 to almost 400 a year. While some of this increase may reflect better reporting, globally, disaster risk is increasing for most hazards, owing mainly to rapidly increasing exposure. More people now live in exposed areas, such as flood plains and coastlines.

12. Despite the overall increase in risk, countries in all regions have been able to reduce mortality risks associated with major weather-related hazards. In most of the world, the risk of being killed by a tropical cyclone or a major river flood is lower currently than it was in 1990.[4] This points to the effectiveness of risk reduction measures. However, the highest burden of natural disaster-related mortality and risk continues to be concentrated in countries with low gross domestic product and weak governance.

13. The link between poverty and disaster risk is well established. Poverty and lack of resources increase vulnerability — the conditions that affect a community's ability to prevent, mitigate, prepare for or respond to hazard events. Global challenges and trends, such as climate change, food and energy price volatility, macroeconomic trends, irregular migration, rapid population growth, unplanned urbanization and environmental degradation, are among the factors challenging progress towards reducing vulnerability in many countries. Disaster risk reduction is also critical to the alleviation of food insecurity and hunger, as natural disasters destroy or erode livelihoods.

14. Rapid economic growth in many low- and middle-income countries has improved human development and reduced poverty for millions of people. This is matched, however, by an equally rapid increase in the exposure of economic assets to natural hazards. Economic losses suffered by low-income households and communities owing to frequently occurring small disasters are increasing rapidly.

15. New evidence confirms that disaster losses particularly affect child welfare and development. Drought, in particular, has been found to have a detrimental impact on child malnutrition rates. Local disaster events have been shown to cause significant reductions in school enrolment. Disasters also have an adverse impact on children's health[5] and children's protection. Such adverse effects of disasters tend to hinder the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

16. As part of risk reduction efforts, Governments and humanitarian organizations are placing greater emphasis on using improved weather and climate information to help reduce the impacts of disasters. Better climate information can inform preparedness, disaster prevention and emergency response. However, the drought in the Horn of Africa has also shown that good early warning systems are only

[4] *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, 2011*, United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

[5] Ibid.

effective if they are used by decision makers to trigger action. Improved monitoring of trends in vulnerability and exposure is also required to further reduce disaster losses.

IV. Key challenges

A. Preparedness for emergency response

17. The trends outlined above show that preparedness for emergency response is of critical and increasing importance in meeting the challenges emanating from the growing number of natural disasters and their impact on the lives and livelihoods of affected populations. Strengthening the capacity of all stakeholders to respond to natural disasters must therefore remain a priority for the United Nations and its partners. Partners have committed to do more through processes such as the Hyogo Framework for Action. However, preparedness encompasses a wide array of activities and the international community still needs to get better at defining roles and responsibilities among humanitarian and development actors, taking into account the aspirations and capacities of the countries in which they are providing assistance.

18. Many examples show that preparedness is a life-saving and cost-effective measure. Effective risk assessment, hazard and epidemiological early warning and risk communication systems, together with community-based preparedness measures, national contingency plans and pre-positioned supplies, have repeatedly been shown to reduce the impacts of disasters on populations in affected countries. But preparedness requires long-term engagement by all partners — Governments, communities, development actors as well as the private sector and humanitarian actors — to help Governments assume leadership and develop their own capacity. Otherwise, growing humanitarian needs will continue to overwhelm limited resources and response capacity, especially in the context of increasing vulnerabilities and drivers of risk, such as climate change, environmental degradation, rapid urbanization and population growth, and a lack of adequate social protection mechanisms.

19. The Hyogo Framework for Action stresses that disaster risk reduction is critical to sustainable social and economic development processes and needs to be addressed in partnership. Disasters undermine development achievements. Priority action five of the Framework — strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels — highlights the essential role that disaster preparedness can play, in particular when integrated into an overall disaster risk reduction approach.

20. Preparedness, in accordance with the Hyogo Framework for Action, is defined as the capacities and knowledge developed by Governments, professional response organizations, communities and individuals to anticipate and respond effectively to the impact of hazard events. It should be based on a sound analysis of disaster risks and be linked to early warning systems. It includes contingency planning, stockpiling of equipment and supplies, emergency services and standby arrangements, communications, information management and coordination arrangements, personnel training, community drills and exercises, and public education. It must be supported by formal institutional, legal and budgetary capacities. It does not include mitigation and prevention measures, such as land use regulations, building standards and crop cycle adjustments, which are equally important in reducing risk and preparing for emergencies.

21. Capacity development is needed to build and maintain the ability of people, organizations and societies to manage risks successfully themselves. Several real time evaluations of previous emergency responses — including the Haiti earthquake and the floods in Pakistan in 2010 — have highlighted the importance and role of national non-governmental organizations as well as civil society more broadly, including youth and women's organizations and networks. Their contributions are generally overlooked and should be encouraged in future preparedness activities. Effective preparedness is locally rooted and therefore requires community participation. The involvement of communities in the design and implementation of activities helps to ensure that they are well tailored to the actual vulnerabilities and to the needs of the affected people.

22. Early warning systems are an essential part of preparedness efforts and can help all actors involved become better at preparing for disasters, rather than reacting to them once they have deteriorated to crisis level. The recent example and response to the drought in the Horn of Africa, however, showed that early warning messages are only effective if they are acted upon. All stakeholders, including Governments, donors and the international humanitarian community, should get better at responding to early warning information. Actions should be taken which enable a swift scale up in the event of a crisis, but which will have no negative impact should the predictions prove wrong.

Clarification of roles at the international level for preparedness

23. There is recognition that the international community needs to develop a more systematic approach to emergency preparedness support aimed at Governments, regional organizations and humanitarian partners. While many international actors are involved in supporting the preparedness efforts of Governments, there is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities. There is currently no single agency which possesses a leadership role in this area. Humanitarian actors have an important part to play in supporting certain aspects of preparedness for emergency response mentioned above, thereby complementing the longer-term capacity-building efforts undertaken by development actors.

24. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee organizations have recognized the urgent need for stronger preparedness at all levels in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of emergency response. They have therefore set "building national capacity for preparedness" as one of their priority topics for 2011. The core issues being addressed include a call for action to strengthen global inter-agency coordination so as to provide better support to country efforts for preparedness capacity development, support country leadership and activities in priority countries, strengthen flexible and inclusive inter-agency coordination methods at the country level and advocate for adequate resources for preparedness.

Regional initiatives for response preparedness

25. Regional organizations and regional groupings of humanitarian partners, through their proximity and familiarity with the local situation, have a unique opportunity to contribute to a more effective response. A number of initiatives are being undertaken by humanitarian partners as well as regional organizations to support response preparedness at the regional level. The Risk, Emergency and Disaster Task Force Inter-Agency Working Group for Latin America and the

Caribbean (REDLAC), inspired by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and set up in 2004, is an example of effective collaboration. After the Haiti earthquake in January 2010, REDLAC members met within two hours and were the first personnel deployed to lead clusters, make assessments and deliver goods and services from pre-positioned stocks in Panama City. The 30 United Nations, Red Cross, Red Crescent and non-governmental organization members of REDLAC regularly come together with donors to exchange information, discuss best practices and plan together. Similarly, the Middle East and North Africa Group — an informal platform similar to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee — provides capacity-building services to the United Nations country teams and local and national partners in the region, fostering information sharing among partners on disaster-prone countries.

26. In the Asia-Pacific region, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has made progress in developing a regional framework for disaster management through the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response. The Agreement governs regional cooperation on disaster risk reduction, response and recovery. The Australia-Indonesia Facility for Disaster Reduction illustrates the great potential of a united commitment to better prepare for and respond to natural disasters. This partnership involves collaboration on innovative scientific solutions and forward-looking analysis to build more effective disaster mitigation, preparedness and response regionally.

27. The United Nations supports the Southern African Development Community Disaster Risk Reduction Unit to undertake regional flood and cyclone preparedness. The areas of support have included contingency plan review and updates, development of assessment tools, simulation exercises and resource mobilization. This has ultimately led to a reduction in loss of lives, as Governments have implemented preparedness measures that include dissemination of early warning information and timely evacuation of people. In West Africa, the Strategic Partnership for Preparedness was implemented during 2010 as a pilot project with regional stakeholders. In the first pilot country, Ghana, the emergency preparedness and response capacity assessment of October 2010 led to revised United Nations Development Assistance Framework components, an action plan and a national simulation exercise. The United Nations also supports the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States through the organization of regional consultations on natural disaster preparedness.

Strengthening international networks and information exchange for response preparedness

28. The United Nations recognizes the utmost importance of strengthening response mechanisms and building resilience to disasters through increased partnership, cooperation and information exchange among national and international response actors. One recent example in this regard is the "International dialogue on strengthening partnership in disaster response: bridging national and international support", launched in collaboration with the Government of Switzerland and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and International Council of Voluntary Agencies, which will convene in October 2011. The United Nations also continues to support Governments through networks and inter-agency services such as the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, the international Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies, the United Nations

Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams or United Nations Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CMCoord).

29. In an effort to facilitate the delivery of international humanitarian assistance in case of a disaster, the United Nations is working to ensure the application of simplified customs procedures. In collaboration with the World Customs Organization, a model agreement has been designed to expedite the import and transit of relief consignments. So far six Governments have signed it. In 2010, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs signed a memorandum of understanding with the World Customs Organization to reinforce the setting up and promotion of customs facilitation measures for relief consignments.

30. As recommended by the General Assembly in its resolution 65/264, the Central Register of Disaster Management Capacities has been discontinued. Alternative databases for specific topics have been implemented and are linked to several public websites of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The global mapping of emergency stockpiles, launched in October 2010, is one of the services which have replaced the Central Register and plays an important role in preparedness. It maintains lists of global relief stocks and creates mutual awareness of each actor's capacities by disseminating information that facilitates improved response ("who has what where").

B. Strengthening the transition from relief to development

31. The guiding principles on humanitarian assistance contained in General Assembly resolution 46/182 recognize the mutually reinforcing relationship between development and humanitarian assistance, through emergency assistance that supports recovery and development. The principles also recognize that economic growth and sustainable development are essential for preparedness against natural disasters and emergency response. However, despite considerable attention to the gap between humanitarian and development action and smooth transition, challenges prevail.

32. In the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, humanitarian action is critical in laying the foundations for recovery and development. However, stronger relationships must be forged with both national and development partners so that short-term objectives are aligned with longer-term goals and international efforts complement, rather than replace, local and national capacities. In order to bridge the divide between humanitarian and development activities, early joint strategic planning is critical to shape a shared understanding of the local context and to reach agreement of short-, medium- and long-term objectives, thereby guiding overall efforts.

33. Promoting self-reliance of affected communities is a prerequisite of sustained development. Humanitarian actors need to maximize opportunities to deliver assistance that supports communities and promotes sustainability, through the active participation of affected people and by building partnerships with local Governments and other actors, including non-governmental organizations and civil society. Social protection systems and safety nets are important tools for managing natural hazards, providing a platform for national preparedness and response, as well as building resilience among vulnerable communities.

34. Humanitarian assistance that promotes local livelihoods (in particular agricultural livelihoods), capacities and social services further supports sustainable recovery. This demands better linkages with commerce in order to stimulate economic activity and provide credit to facilitate recovery. Local procurement, cash-for-work schemes and microcredit initiatives can all assist in stimulating the local economy and promoting local livelihoods. Creating infrastructure for health and education also contributes to job creation and development. Cash-for-training initiatives which develop entrepreneurial skills also stimulate the economy while building capacity for income generation.

35. Efforts are ongoing to strengthen linkages between humanitarian and development action, and recent initiatives in Haiti and Pakistan demonstrate a greater commitment to ensure more sustainable humanitarian approaches. At the global level, the United Nations Development Group-Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs Working Group on Transition brings together humanitarian and development partners to develop global policy and practice in transition contexts, and efforts are under way to strengthen cooperation of development and humanitarian actors at the field level. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee recently published guidance for clusters (endorsed in July 2011) on better engagement with national authorities and an Inter-Agency Standing Committee reference group has been established to work with local authorities to address urban challenges. In Haiti concerted action has been taken by the clusters to strengthen engagement with national actors and eventually phase into national structures. In addition, the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities initiative (founded by a group of relief, development and media agencies) was launched in Haiti and Pakistan in order to provide local media services to communicate lifesaving information to affected people and to feed back their voices to influence the design and execution of relief and recovery efforts. Because the need to promote self-reliance and stimulate the local economy is well understood, cash payments have been provided instead of non-food items to communities in Haiti, Pakistan and most recently in the drought-affected Horn of Africa.

36. In order to support these efforts, the United Nations system, Member States and humanitarian actors can take steps to ensure that humanitarian planning is informed by recovery and longer-term development approaches through the involvement of development experts in strategic planning dialogue, reference to United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and national development plans, and existing-capacity and development-impact assessments. Steps can also be taken to ensure that financing for humanitarian activities, including through United Nations appeals processes and pooled funding arrangements, gives appropriate attention to projects that achieve humanitarian and long-term development objectives in a mutually supportive manner. The participation of national and development actors, such as international financial institutions and regional banks, non-governmental organizations, local and international corporate interests, as well as local communities, should be systematically incorporated into coordination mechanisms, at different levels. Donors can also assist in bridging the humanitarian-development funding gap through the provision of long-term but flexible funding and by allowing programmes to shift between development and emergency phases in response to the external context.

C. Humanitarian response in urban settings

37. The majority of the world's population currently lives in urban areas and by 2030 an estimated 59 per cent will be living in cities and towns. Over 90 per cent of this urban growth will be in the developing world. An estimated one third of all urban dwellers are chronically poor and live in precarious informal settlements and slums, without adequate water, sanitation, health, education and transportation services. These communities are especially vulnerable to natural hazards, as their coping mechanisms and resilience are already stressed. They are also highly vulnerable to food price volatility, as they are almost entirely dependent on markets for food. The 2010 joint United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)/World Health Organization report, entitled *Hidden Cities: Unmasking and Overcoming Health Inequities*, drew attention to the need for strengthening health emergency management capacities so as to reduce vulnerability and improve disaster responses in cities. The impact of climate change will be disproportionately high for urban dwellers, since 13 per cent of the world's urban population live in low-elevation coastal zones in many of the world's largest cities, especially in Asia. Environmental degradation and desertification are increasingly forcing the displacement of many poor households into under-served informal urban settlements.

38. Because cities are home to large and dense concentrations of populations, the potential impact of natural disasters can be enormous, both in terms of loss of life and economic assets. With rapid urbanization, the numbers of people at risk are growing dramatically. The most vulnerable are the 1 billion urban poor residing in rapidly growing, uncontrolled and densely populated informal settlements and slums in hazard-prone locations. The failure of urban authorities to regulate building standards and land-use planning exacerbate vulnerability and make the management of humanitarian crises in urban areas complex. The concentration of economic resources, health facilities, critical infrastructure and other social resources in cities also means that urban disasters can have disproportionately higher negative impacts on national economies and services.

39. The social and political complexity of urban areas calls for partnerships with local governments, the private sector and community-based organizations (including youth and women's networks) for disaster risk reduction, preparedness and emergency assistance. Access to densely populated urban areas is often difficult and conventional methods of needs assessment do not always adequately distinguish between the ongoing chronic needs of the urban poor and the more acute vulnerability provoked by a disaster.

40. In order to strengthen the ability of humanitarian actors to more effectively respond to emergencies in urban areas, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee endorsed its first strategy and action for meeting humanitarian challenges in urban areas, in November 2010. The strategy is built around six strategic objectives: develop operational strategies early-on, if not before a disaster, that ensure multi-stakeholder partnerships for enhanced coordination, impact and effectiveness of humanitarian interventions; strengthen technical surge capacity for urban-based emergencies; meet the gaps in humanitarian approaches and tools for urban areas; promote protection of vulnerable urban populations against violence and exploitation; restore livelihoods and economic opportunities, starting in the emergency phase; and build preparedness into humanitarian assistance policies linked to broader disaster risk reduction plans.

41. The strategy clearly recognizes that if disaster risk reduction and preparedness activities are to be fully effective, national implementation capacity has to be built or strengthened in most countries. However, in order to be accountable to affected local populations for saving lives and livelihoods in complex urban settings, disaster risk reduction and preparedness plans need to be re-scaled from the national level to the municipal level. Capacity-building is equally critical for municipal authorities and community organizations.

42. Inter-Agency Standing Committee partners are working with several national and municipal governments, disaster management institutions and civil society to develop at-risk country preparedness strategies as pilot activities linked to broader disaster risk reduction plans. Among the capacities that need to be strengthened are: hazard identification and urban risk mapping, community risk assessments linked to city and national disaster risk programmes, establishment of multi-stakeholder advisory forums, strengthening of connections and information exchange between local communities and local governments in planning and implementation of disaster risk reduction and preparedness activities; improvements in early warning systems; institutional arrangements for permanent disaster risk reduction management; and disaster risk reduction mainstreaming into local development planning, including urban planning. A number of initiatives are under way to address some of these issues. These include the cooperation between the UN-Habitat World Urban Campaign and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Resilient Cities Campaign to reinforce the Hyogo Framework and disaster risk reduction with local governments, and various initiatives of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Sub-Working Group on Preparedness.

V. Progress in strengthening humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters

A. Lessons learned on strengthening the coordination and response capacity when facing natural disasters of large magnitude

43. In 2010 the responses to the earthquake in Haiti and the floods in Pakistan stretched the capacity of the humanitarian community and highlighted the importance of strong leadership and of a well coordinated response integrated with Government structures. Inter-agency real time evaluations found that while there has been progress, weak leadership caused coordination and response challenges. The sheer size of the responses, in terms of the number of actors and geographical reach, created unique coordination challenges that required flexible structures, strong analysis and experienced, dedicated cluster coordinators with information management support. These challenges once again demonstrated the need to immediately deploy the right staff with the right skills.

44. The inter-agency real time evaluations also highlighted the need to better involve local capacity and affected populations in relief efforts. During the response in Haiti, an innovative mechanism was set up to promote accountability towards affected populations. The Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities initiative brought together partners and experts in a collective effort to improve two-way communication between the humanitarian community and affected

populations. The recently revised Sphere Handbook (2011) also provides an important tool to help ensure that programme delivery meets the highest standards.[6]

45. In response to the lessons learned from various disasters, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee principals have committed to work in partnership in order to make quantifiable improvements to humanitarian coordination and response to large-scale emergencies. Every new major emergency response is reviewed to ensure that it has the required leadership. Where gaps in senior, experienced humanitarian leadership are identified, they will be addressed quickly. Options for ensuring better leadership and coordination also include convening the Inter-Agency Standing Committee at the highest level to discuss the response to a new crisis. The pools of available, experienced and competent humanitarian coordinators, cluster coordinators and other emergency managers and advisers are being expanded, and Inter-Agency Standing Committee organizations have flexible human resources arrangements that allow for their rapid deployment. Other examples include the work which is under way to refocus the responsibilities of cluster lead agencies and partners on achieving agreed results, define criteria for cluster participation and clarify the definition of provider of last resort. In this context, non-governmental organization consortiums are also determining the minimum requirements of organizations to be included as part of a cluster and in a humanitarian country team.

B. Humanitarian financing for disasters associated with natural hazards

46. Since June 2010, the United Nations and its partner organizations have issued flash appeals and emergency action plans in response to natural disasters in four countries. The Central Emergency Response Fund was the largest single source of revenue for three of these appeals, with contributions ranging from $1.2 million to $6.1 million, except for Pakistan, where $42 million was provided. Playing a complementary role to the Central Emergency Response Fund, the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies allocated a total of $21.6 million in 2010 to national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in order to support their disaster response operations. Three quarters of those allocations were made as grants to cover the costs of small- or medium-scale operations, for which no emergency appeal had been launched.

47. Emergency Response Funds and Common Humanitarian Funds offered strategic value in delivering responses to natural disasters. The Emergency Response Fund in Pakistan provided over $34.6 million allocated for 3.8 million affected persons, and the Common Humanitarian Funds and Emergency Response Funds in East Africa and the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda) enabled speedy response to droughts and floods with $83 million. The unearmarked nature allows decision-making from field-level, where needs are best known and disbursements are quick.

48. In 2010 contributions from the private sector to the Central Emergency Response Fund rose to an all-time high of $4.4 million, owing in part to large-scale emergencies, such as the Haiti earthquake and the Pakistan floods. The United Nations continues to further partnerships with the private sector.

[6] *The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response.*

49. While the United Nations has made significant progress in using country-based pooled funds and the Central Emergency Response Fund with increasing effectiveness, there is still no similar fund for preparedness measures. Funding for preparedness remains ad hoc and inconsistent, and innovative approaches need to be sought to ensure dedicated resources for response preparedness. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Humanitarian Financing Group is working to track funding for preparedness, including through existing funding mechanisms, with a view to improving the predictability and quality of preparedness funding. Moreover, contributions for early recovery activities are often delayed and limited, which threatens to reduce the impact of response efforts.

C. Strengthening evidence-based decision-making in humanitarian operations: needs assessment and analysis

50. Better coordinated and harmonized needs assessments are critical for improving aid effectiveness and accountability to beneficiaries, decision-making and funding. To this end, the United Nations and its partners, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Needs Assessment Task Force, have focused on finalizing an operational framework consisting of guidance on coordinated assessments, key indicators, a joint assessment methodology and a platform to consolidate information. A pool and roster of assessment experts has been established, and capacities of both national and international partners have been built. These ongoing investments are intended to strengthen the level of preparedness and ability to underpin emergency responses and consolidated appeals processes with a robust evidence base.

51. The Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises describes key actions for coordinated assessments, roles and responsibilities and common principles, while underscoring the overall responsibility of national authorities. It recommends tailored assessment methodologies and proposes standard operating procedures. The Task Force also agreed on a standard menu of qualitative and quantitative indicators for each sector. The multi-cluster initial rapid assessment endeavours to provide an overview of needs of the affected population and response priorities for international support during the initial phase of an emergency. It allows stakeholders to reach a shared understanding of the humanitarian situation at the onset of an emergency. The humanitarian dashboard, a platform supporting the consolidation of humanitarian information and analysis, has been produced for four countries. Two additional dashboards are under development. By the end of 2011, the guidance and its tools will have been applied in at least four humanitarian emergencies and preparedness contexts. In parallel, recognizing the need to link needs assessments with preparedness efforts, the revision of the post-disaster needs assessment methodology is placing greater emphasis on integrating disaster risk reduction in disaster recovery.

D. Humanitarian principles and humanitarian access to populations affected by natural disasters

52. Humanitarian action should be conducted on the basis of need and in line with the core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. National authorities have primary responsibility for providing

assistance and adequate protection to those affected by natural disasters. Member States are also urged to facilitate access to populations affected by disasters. In order to reach populations in need and provide timely assistance to populations affected by disaster, humanitarian access is essential. Unfortunately, the ability of humanitarian actors to access those populations continues to be jeopardized in many humanitarian crisis situations.

53. Most constraints on access are not deliberately obstructive and in many cases it is a combination of constraints, rather than a single factor, which renders access difficult. Disasters frequently cause widespread destruction of homes and public infrastructure, including roads. Identifying populations in need and delivering assistance to them effectively is often hampered by limited physical access to disaster areas and security considerations (in particular in the first weeks of the emergency). Other constraints include bureaucratic requirements for the entry of personnel and import of equipment and relief supplies, the diversion of aid, as well as interferences with the passage of personnel and goods and with the implementation of activities.

54. Achieving and maintaining access requires coordinated efforts and liaison with the relevant actors at all levels to establish acceptance for humanitarian actors and their work. Preparedness efforts can help reduce access constraints in the event of a natural disaster, for instance when they are addressed during contingency planning processes. Moreover, in order to assist States in preparing their legal and institutional arrangements for international disaster assistance, the United Nations and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies continue to promote the implementation of the guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance. The thirty-first International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, in November 2011, will be an opportunity for the States parties to the Geneva Conventions to review their progress in implementing the guidelines and to devise strategies for accelerating their implementation, in particular in disaster-prone countries.

E. Displacement and protection in situations of natural disasters

55. Natural disasters displace more people than any other cause. In 2010 some 42 million people were forced from their homes as a result of sudden-onset natural disasters, according to a study by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.[7] Effective disaster risk reduction and preparedness are critical to help avert and minimize the scale, duration and impact of displacement. After the emergency stage of a disaster is over, efforts must also be devoted to finding durable solutions that facilitate voluntary, safe and dignified return or local integration. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has developed guidance to assist national authorities and humanitarian and development actors in their efforts to help internally displaced persons to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of disaster.[8]

56. In many natural disaster contexts, most recently in Haiti and Pakistan, experience has shown that disasters create new protection risks and compound

[7] *Displacement due to natural hazard-induced disasters*, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, June 2011.

[8] IASC framework on durable solutions for internally displaced persons, April 2010, available from www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/04_durable_solutions.aspx.

pre-existing vulnerabilities. Protection concerns that frequently arise include ensuring equal access to assistance, in particular for older persons, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons and other persons with special needs, including separated children, survivors of sexual violence and single-headed households. Addressing a lack of security, preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including sexual violence as well as such harmful coping mechanisms such as early/forced marriage, is equally crucial, as is the replacement of personal documentation (which is often needed to access essential services) and maintaining housing, land and property rights. Typical protection concerns following natural disasters also include the handling of mortal remains, the reunification of separated families and the prevention of child trafficking and illegal adoption. In addition, the psychosocial impact of natural disasters is substantial. Mitigating these risks or avoiding them altogether will require taking into account relevant protection guarantees in disaster response. In October 2010 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee adopted revised operational guidelines on the protection of persons in situations of natural disasters, to assist humanitarian organizations and national authorities in undertaking the essential task of incorporating protection in disaster preparedness, response and recovery activities.[9]

57. While protection concerns are often acute in natural disasters, to date the international community has lacked predictable and effective leadership and coordination on protection in such situations. In January 2011 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee agreed to pilot a new arrangement for designating a cluster lead agency for protection in such situations. Under this new arrangement, it is envisaged that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees would assume the leadership role on the basis of a request by and the consent of the State concerned, and in the event the two other protection-mandated agencies (the United Nations Children's Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) are not already present with sufficient capacity and expertise to fulfil that role.

58. Humanitarian actors have sought to strengthen the protection response in natural disasters also by increasing the deployment, through protection standby mechanisms, of staff to assist in integrating protection in the response to disasters in several countries during the reporting period. In addition, the Global Protection Cluster Task Force on Natural Disasters has developed a training module for humanitarian staff on protection in natural disasters.

F. Strengthening gender mainstreaming

59. Mainstreaming gender in disaster risk management has been a priority of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee gender sub-working group during the reporting period. One aspect of this work has been the deployment of GenCap Gender Advisers in a regional capacity to southern Africa and the South Pacific. This is seen as a pilot initiative from which lessons will be drawn for wider dissemination. In southern Africa, efforts of the GenCap Gender Adviser are focused on four countries in the region (Comoros, Madagascar, Mozambique and Zambia) which are annually plagued by floods, cyclones and droughts. Simulation exercises and lessons learned

[9] IASC operational guidelines on the protection of persons in situations of natural disasters, January 2011, available from ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/Operational%20Guidelines.pdf.

from emergencies in the region brought to light that gender issues are regularly overlooked in disaster preparedness and response. The vulnerabilities and capacities of women and girls in particular are not always taken into consideration in national policies and plans, even if they are engaged at the community level.

60. Acknowledging this gap, the humanitarian country team of Mozambique, for instance, took the decision to mainstream gender in its 2012 contingency plan. In April 2011 members of the clusters were trained on the use of the "gender marker", a tool to improve humanitarian response by ensuring that projects designed in consolidated appeals processes and pooled funds fully take into account the different needs of women, girls, boys and men. Efforts are also under way to develop gender-sensitive tools to enable proper gender analyses. Once finalized, these tools will be disseminated to States members of the Southern African Development Community for in-country use in disaster risk reduction activities.

61. Similar efforts are under way to support gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management in the Pacific region, initially in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Pacific women are highly involved in local preparedness and initiatives for building disaster resilient communities. However, their roles in mitigating and preparing for disasters and in managing emergencies usually go unrecognized in formal disaster management processes and they tend to be excluded from planning relief distributions. In each of the five countries, gender equality networks have now been formed to facilitate participation.

G. Civil-military relations in natural disaster response

62. Continued efforts have been undertaken to further increase understanding of appropriate interaction between military actors and humanitarian organizations in preparedness and response to natural disasters. Whether national, international or United Nations forces, the military, with its unique capability, can play a significant role in supporting humanitarian disaster response operations. An extensive training and exercise programme covering humanitarian civil-military coordination (UN-CMCoord) continues to support Member States to enhance their preparedness and response capacity.

63. As illustrated by the example of the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, a number of potential coordination challenges are often amplified as a result of bilateral foreign military assistance in response to the request of an affected State, such as maintaining the civilian character of humanitarian assistance. Member States that engage their military forces in support of humanitarian response are encouraged to liaise with humanitarian coordination mechanisms from the early stages of the emergency and at all levels to ensure best and coordinated use of key military capabilities.

64. The Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods have further emphasized the need for a constant dialogue between humanitarian and military actors. Following the Haiti earthquake, and the identification of coordination gaps between humanitarian and international military actors, the humanitarian community has been developing country-specific guidelines on interaction between humanitarian organizations and the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. This process has been critical to prepare for the 2011 hurricane season as well as possible cholera outbreaks. Member States are encouraged to continue supporting the development of country-

specific and, where applicable, regional humanitarian guidelines on civil-military coordination and their dissemination among their national forces.

65. The provision of military assets to support humanitarian action must take place in an appropriate, predictable and complementary manner so as to ensure that humanitarian needs can be addressed wherever they arise and in line with humanitarian principles. Internationally established guidelines, such as the "Oslo guidelines" on the use of foreign military and civil defence assets in disaster relief and the guidelines on the use of military and civil defence assets to support United Nations humanitarian activities in complex emergencies ("MCDA guidelines") are designed to support such efforts. Military assets should only be deployed to address specific needs identified by the humanitarian community, as a last resort, respecting international guidelines and national guidance, and in support of humanitarian action. In 2011 the General Assembly adopted its resolution 65/307 on improving the effectiveness and coordination of military and civil defence assets for natural disaster response.

H. The evolving role of technology in disaster response

66. Over the past few years, developments in the communications sector have transformed the way humanitarian actors communicate, use and process information. Recent developments will have a direct and immediate impact on disaster response operations and on the lives of communities vulnerable to natural hazards or affected by a disaster. Trends in this sector include increasing participation of affected populations in information-creation and sharing, the increasing use of mobile-based technology and social media, the need to manage an ever-increasing amount of information available and the increasing role of volunteer communities in creating information through "crowd-sourcing".[10] It is expected that mobile devices — in particular the smartphone — will have a significant impact on future humanitarian responses. Information technology can also play an important role in preparedness and for needs assessments, be it through the preparation of common operational datasets,[11] through community preparedness programmes, remote sensing, or sophisticated early warning systems which combine environmental monitoring with pre-existing data, and link humanitarian and civil defence actors with one another, with national and local governments, and with communities. They also allow for increased accountability towards affected populations. In moving forward with the use of technology in disaster response, promoting new and existing partnerships with the private sector will be important.

67. During the response to the Haiti earthquake in January 2010, for instance, it became clear that the volunteer and technical community could add value to the humanitarian response. Members of the affected community generated information using social media and widely available mobile technologies. However, the international humanitarian system was not well equipped to handle this information.

[10] Crowd-sourcing is the act of outsourcing tasks, traditionally performed by an employee or contractor, to a large group of people or community (a crowd), through an open call. The crowd is generally composed of those who are prepared to volunteer their time contributing content and solving problems.

[11] Common operational datasets are an Inter-Agency Standing Committee-agreed set of critical baseline datasets that are used to coordinate the work of humanitarian actors.

Around the world, volunteers helped aggregate, translate and plot this information on maps. While the use of technology can enable disaster-affected populations to transmit critical information, thereby increasing the speed, relevance and effectiveness of assistance provided, there are also challenges that persist, such as questions of privacy, relevance and verification of information, duplication and meeting the expectations which this interaction can create. Recognizing these trends, the United Nations commissioned a report which examines the current information landscape, requirements and possible opportunities and challenges, and provides recommendations.[12] Discussions in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Information Management Task Force are ongoing and are taking on board these recommendations.

VI. Recommendations

68. Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian partners are encouraged to recognize the critical importance of disaster preparedness and, in this respect, Member States are encouraged to increase support for the efforts by the United Nations and humanitarian partners to support strengthening the response capacity of local, regional and national actors, in particular capacities of first responders.

69. Member States are encouraged to increase their legal preparedness for effective disaster management by using the guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance, and to sign the model customs facilitation agreement to facilitate the import and transit of the relief consignments and possessions of relief personnel in the event of disasters and other emergencies.

70. The United Nations system and other humanitarian actors are called upon to continue efforts to ensure that early recovery is taken into account in humanitarian programming throughout all sectors and to ensure that development actors are included in strategic planning at an earlier stage.

71. Member States and the humanitarian community are strongly encouraged to take into consideration the unique consequences of natural disasters in urban areas and to ensure that they are adequately reflected in preparedness measures. Member States should encourage strong working partnerships between national and local governments, communities, private sector, civil society actors and other humanitarian actors to ensure effective risk management, contingency planning and preparedness for emergencies, including in urban areas.

72. The United Nations system and other humanitarian actors are urged to increase the level of human and financial resources provided to humanitarian and resident coordinators for leading and coordinating disaster preparedness and early recovery activities, and are encouraged to make use of such tools as the *Handbook for RCs* [resident coordinators] *and HCs* [humanitarian coordinators] *on Emergency Preparedness and Response*.

[12] Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. *Disaster Relief 2.0: The Future of Information Sharing in Humanitarian Emergencies*. United Nations Foundation and Vodafone Foundation Technology Partnership, 2011.

73. Member States are encouraged to provide timely, flexible and predictable funding for preparedness and early recovery, including through established humanitarian funding instruments.

74. Member States are also encouraged to continue providing early and multi-year commitments to the Central Emergency Response Fund and other United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian financing mechanisms, including the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, in order to ensure predictable and timely access to resources for humanitarian emergencies that result from disasters associated with natural hazards. Private sector partners are also encouraged to contribute to the Central Emergency Response Fund and other established humanitarian financing mechanisms.

75. Safe, timely and unhindered access to vulnerable populations is a prerequisite for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. Member States are urged to facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian personnel and supplies to communities affected by natural disasters.

76. Member States, the United Nations system and humanitarian, development and human rights partners are encouraged to identify protection concerns prior to, during and in the aftermath of a disaster, and to address such concerns systematically and in close collaboration with affected communities, local and national Governments, in preparedness, relief and recovery, recognizing that protection-related activities are as life-saving as any other sectoral activities in natural disaster situations.

77. Member States are encouraged to utilize the Inter-Agency Standing Committee operational guidelines on the protection of persons in situations of natural disasters in the implementation of contingency planning, disaster preparedness, response and recovery, and to work together by studying the experiences of disaster-prone countries and regions in order to reduce the scale, duration and impact of internal displacement in the event of natural disasters.

78. Member States are also encouraged to promote and incorporate the guiding principles on internal displacement in national legislation, policies and programmes in order to address the needs and rights of persons displaced by disasters.

79. Member States and humanitarian organizations are reminded of the need to maintain the fundamentally civilian character of emergency humanitarian assistance and are asked to ensure that the use of foreign military assets is appropriate, timely, unique in capability and availability, only at the request or with the consent of the affected State and coordinated with the emergency relief coordinator, as a last resort, and in conformity with international law and humanitarian principles, as well as internationally established guidelines, such as the "Oslo guidelines", the military and civil defence assets guidelines and regional and country/context-specific guidance, where present.

80. Member States are encouraged to support the efforts of the United Nations system, in coordination with other humanitarian actors, to strengthen the coordination and harmonization of needs assessments, including by supporting the building of international and national humanitarian assessment capacities.

81. Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian partners are encouraged to explore opportunities for further utilizing the potential of new technologies to improve the effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian response and to

engage with the volunteer and technical community to make use of the variety of information available during emergencies.

82. Member States and the United Nations system are encouraged to apply a multi-hazard approach to their preparedness activities. In particular, due consideration should be given to secondary environmental hazards, especially those stemming from industrial and technological accidents. Greater attention should be given to the humanitarian component of environmental emergencies.

83. Member States and the United Nations system are also encouraged to support initiatives that address the different impacts of natural disasters on individuals and groups, and strengthen the involvement of women, men, boys and girls in preparedness and contingency planning actions, including through the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex, age and other relevant factors, and to implement gender markers in humanitarian funding mechanisms in order to track funding allocations to gender and gender-based violence prevention and response programming.

84. Member States, the United Nations system and humanitarian actors are encouraged to take account of the principles and minimum standards outlined in the revised Sphere Project handbook, *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*, in their humanitarian actions and disaster responses.

85. The United Nations and other humanitarian actors are called upon to further strengthen partnerships and collaboration with the private sector in areas including resource mobilization and in-kind assistance, as well as transfer of knowledge and capacities.